Depot Town Rag

January 1988

FREE 100% RAG CONTENT

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

The Commercial Italianate Architectural Style — in Ypsilanti's Nineteenth Centry Depot Town

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Part One: The Italian influence

"This Renaissance Detroit can't enter; of local history, we're the center." - popular neighborhood song.

Italianate architecture manifested itself in Depot Town long before anyone could order a pizza at Pronto's or pasta primavera and Paponetti's. In what has come to be called the "Victorial Era,' the Italian look was one of the loveliest designs of the period, showing itself right after the Greek Revival style and just before Romanesque, Gothic Revival and Second Empire.

The entrepreneurs of the early industrial revolution were so busy cutting down forests and making money that they couldn't be bothered trying to invent some new architectural style. What they really wanted was something that would balance their new-found love for machinery and factories and coal yards. All that excitement around the huffing and puffing steam engines needed to be contrasted with something softer, more exotic and more genteel. Perhaps a Greek temple would be nice. Or a Medieval monastery or a French palace? The adaptations of romantic styles appeared in every prosperous mill town in America and the re-productions of the Renaissance temples of Florence, Italy found their way as far west as Ypsilanti, as well.

When rail towns like Ypsilanti were constructed in the early 1800's, few of the builders could afford fancy architects. Many of the buildings that clustered at the railhead in Ypsilanti until 1838 were simple frame structures and looked much like those seen in Hollywood movies for Way Out West scenes. There was a generation of tents and log cabins before that, too, but with the creative economic boom caused by the steam engine came the construction of edifices which were up-to-date and stylish in the mode of the day. The new fashion of the 1850's was Italianate. Ypsilanti was destined to be trendy, too.

Even though most property owners along the new rail lanes were prosperous, they weren't wealthy enough to send away for an architect. Neither could they afford to travel to Italy to see what was being copied by the English at that time. About all they could afford was the 'style books' which showed what the English were copying from the Italians.

We see the results of the Italianate boom in America in most of mid-century buildings in Depot Town: the Masonic Block, the Thompson Block, Aubree's Saloon and the Follett House. The shop known as the Vintage Passion had so much of the Italianate removed over the years that painters decided four years ago to paint it back on -the only Faux (fake) Italiante in town. (The Ypsilanti Historic District Commission was so enthusiastic about that silly project that the painters had to make them promise not to let anyone else do the same to their buildings, lest they come up with a whole town painted onto *Trompe l'oiel* false fronts.) *Cont'd on page 2*

Beginning a new series: The Commercial Italianate Architectural Style

in Ypsilanti's Nineteenth Century Depot Town

—accompanied by photographs and drawings by local artists:

1. **The Italian Influence**
   "This Renaissance Detroit can't enter; of local history, we're the center!"
2. **Prototypes of the Italianate style**
   A 'musical history' of vernacular buildings
3. **Cast Iron Usage in Facade Construction**
   The iron horse, men of iron and iron buildings
4. **The Bracketed Cornice Components**
   The Crown Jewels are coming back to Depot Town
5. **Stone Quoins at the Corner**
   Three quoins in the Foutain? Splashy designs!
6. **Window Caps and Rows**
   Here's looking at you, Leonardo!
7. **Italianate Roots and Traces in Other Styles**
   The sincerest form of flattery

What can you believe?

1. We're going onto the Metric System in a year or so.

2. When Fermi II goes on, electricity will be nearly free for all consumers; but, in the meantime, theres an energy crisis, so cut down on light bulb usage.

3. When E.F. Hutton talks, we listen.

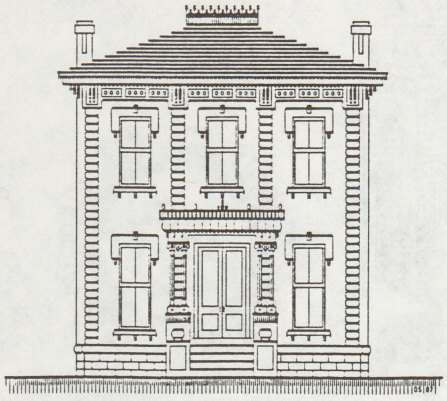
4. If we all drive 55, we'll save gas and lives. It's a law we can live with.

5. The MCRR depot at Ypsilanti will soon be restored and become a classy new restaurant.

6. "I am not a crook," "Mistakes were made," "She's my neice from out of town," etc.

Are thay all just lies, lies and more lies?

See inside this issue for the astounding truth!



Architect, Denis Schmeideke's Christmas greeting included this computerized rendering of an Italianate house and we just couldn't leave it out of this, *The Rag's* first installment on that architectural style's commercial cousin.

Denis' technical notes: "The image is a simulation of an Italiante Style house of the 19th Century, USA (1855-1875), generated by an electronic typewriter (Panasonic KX-E708) with a 40 character display strip screen. The graphics were composed of separate architectural elements in electronic files (texts) named CHIMNEYS, ROOF, CORNICE, QUOINS, OPENINGS (Doors & windows) and PORCH. These elements were 'built up' with basic sub-routines (phrase memories), altered as required for the needs of each architectural element. The final output was assembled by a master command 'to build the house' (via linked texts) from the roof down."

Watch for all these elements in the next several installments.

The truth (as advertised on page one): Metrics, Fermi power, E.F. Hutton, the 55-mile per hour speed limit, Watergate, Iran-scam and other such scandals were never touted in *The Depot Town Rag,* but the MCRR depot was. Five different times in eleven years. And were we ever embarrassed. How can we make it up to our loyal readers?

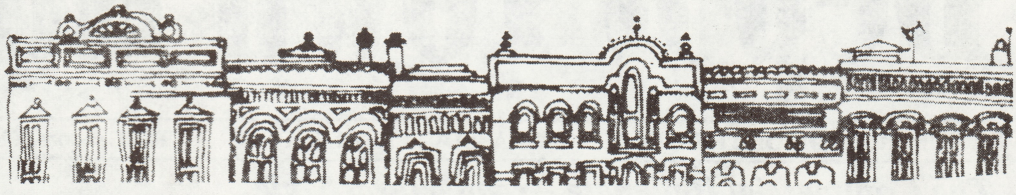
We hestitated to print the same old lies all over again. Then we saw the snow fence go up. And then they replaced the damaged brick around the outside. Cheery articles began to appear in the dialies. After that, they carted out tons of trash from the building's interior. The Historic District Commission gave their blessing.

Now, the architect, Al Paas, sends us the following plan for the first floor interior. We'll see. Can you believe it?

Cont'd from page one

The Newel Block is a curious blend of Italianate with Gothic Revival windows on the third floor and still other buildings in the district have echoes of the style repeated in them. Even the new Cross Street Bridge contains the same rhythmic elements of the Italianate window caps as it bridges the Huron River from the original plat of Ypsilanti to its first addition - what is now called Depot Town.

This new series will run for seven or eight installments in the monthly *Depot Town Rag* in order to familiarize our friends and neighbors with the elements that we don't see any more.



Note that, since we started using some of the design elements of the cornices in the banner at the top of this paper's front page, many people just assumed they were still intact on the buildings. (Very few are, but they're coming back). The editors hope this series of articles will challenge us to get out on the sidewalks again and look at the marvelous examples we have in our built environment.

In order to see the Italianate style in proper perspective, it must be noted that there were three basic house styles representing the period: the Italian Villa (the old fire hall, and the house just south of the new Chamber of Commerce office), the Italianate (cube) and the urban Brownstone seen in great numbers in east coast cities. The commercial adaptation of those closely related styles which were so popular in central business districts are found in great and gorgeous number in Ypsilanti, Michigan, if not in every town in the mid-west. (At last the truth can be told! Downtown's commercial Italianate structures are older than Depot Town's! In fact, they started the movement in Our Town, and the newer properties being developed down by the depot just followed the trendy new style.)

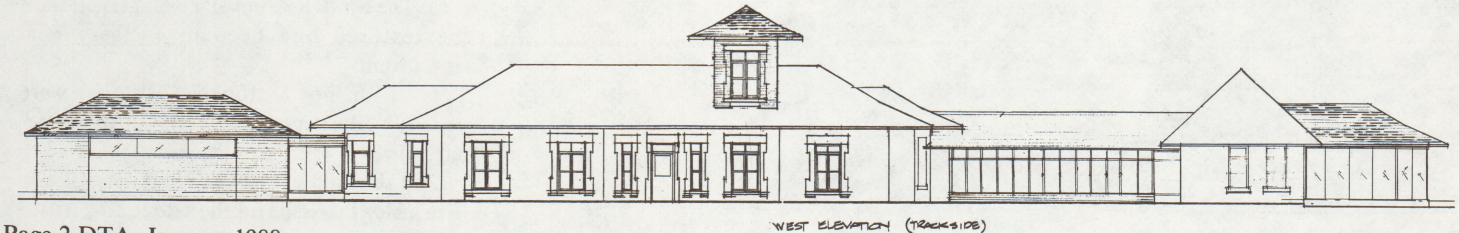
Subsequent installments in this series will explore prototypes for the style, the use of cast iron in the facades, elements of the bracketed cornice, corner designs called quoins, window rows and caps, and the concept's roots in the Federal and Greek Revival styles. We may be hedging when we say "seven or eight installments," but when we started the last series, we were inundated with additional information from our readers. Who knows? By the time the series ends, someone may propose an Ypsilanti Greek Theatre and we may be seeing yet another Greek Revival in Our Town. We're ready to rehash that one, too, if need be.

Pronto Pizza
Pizza & Subs
37 East Cross • 483-4555

Paponetti's Pasta
Homemade Italian Food
and Pastries
17 East Cross 483-3574

Architect's plans for the MCRR depot at Ypsilanti

With the working title of "Maple Street Station," DesRosiers Architects, of Birmingham, Michigan, show the replication of the tower which was destroyed in the train wreck of 1939. In this track-side (west) elevation, the main building is connected to the baggage building by a glassed-in greenhouse and another extention of glass reaches toward the Cross and River Street intersection. The plan also calls for the replication of the signal tower near the crossing.



WEST ELEVATION (TRACKSIDE)

Winter window walk Categorical results:

Immediately after the December 13 concert by Our Lady's Madrigal Singers, many of our friends and neighbors toured the block to 'judge' the annual Victorian Holiday window designs. Every lighted and decorated window was guaranteed a prize and the judges' task was to create a category for each. Here's their list:

Four-star Michelin-type recognition (*****) and other honorable mentions:

Aubree's - Apples of our eye, suspended from all four windows

Pronto Pizza - A Las Vegas Holiday of incandescent and neon.

Standard Printing - Old Fashioned overall decor in windows and throughout the front office.

Cross Street Antiques - Nostalgic joy, artfully lighted merchandise.

Apple Annie's & Jim MacDonald's - Originality, a hand bag tree suggest the condition of our wallets after the holdiays?

Stichin' Shop - High Fashion chic, subtly lighted.

Depot Doo - A child's Christmas past in the elaborate train set.

Our Little Secret - Nativity remembered through elegant porcelain figures.

J & J Trading Post - Newcomer's award. Welcome to the block.

The Cricket Box ***** - Sugar Plum Fantasy

Paponetti's Pasta - Traditional Color Scheme carries out year-long Italian theme.

Freight House/Farmers' Market - Unique tree, telescopes from an easily stored container to an enormous, decorated monolith.

Grand Trunk - The Nutcracker, depicted in dreamlike models and dolls.

Kelly Services - Golden Glitter in packages and decorations.

Vitamin Shoppe - La petite noel in a tiny, but elegant display.

Theracom - Most neighborly, this facade has no windows, but hung lighted garlands across the top line of the several doors.

Esquire Interiors - Deck the halls *and* all the windows.

City Body - Simplicity. This facade should lend itself to much more decor after another building season. Just look what's happened to the other walls in the last year!

Shear Genius - Jolly season award for good humored decor all year 'round.

Old Town Coin & Gold - Gold and Silver Bells in the city. A visual carol.

Vintage Passion - Passionately missed, but the door was sprayed with snowflakes for the event.

Old Town Restuarant - Sleigh Bells ringing through the longest window spread in the block.

Ike's Barbershop - Un-bear-ably charming collection of Teddies.

Miller's Ice Cream Parlor **** - Absolutely Dolling.

Peddler's Path **** - Classic Elegance

River Arts Works - Easel does it, with the before-and-after graphic.

Shankwiler's **** - The Ultimate Christmas Tree.

Depot Exchange - Bag Full of Goodies is a year 'round condition here.

Sidetrack **** - Baby, it's pretty inside!

Miller Motors - The 1933 Essex Terraplane award. This is the first time in a long time that we have seen *two* cars in the showroom. Are they stockpiling for the new model year? Good show!

Thanks, also, to the many who displayed the Gingerbread House entries. This, too, could grow into another tradition for the district. They were all winners!

Anyone who missed being categorized must note that the shop window is your 24-hour advertiser. Show off your services and goods all year around with effective lighting displays.

Old Town Restaurant
Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
38 East Cross

Depot Doo
Fine Design in Hair Style
25 East Cross • 484-3045

The Vitamin Shoppe
Vitamins, Herbs, Nutritional Suppliments
9 East Cross • 485-2711

Gingerbread House Contest Winners

The Depot Town Merchants Association announces the winner of the First Annual Gingerbread House Contest.

First prize of $100 went to Bob Marken of Ypsilanti.

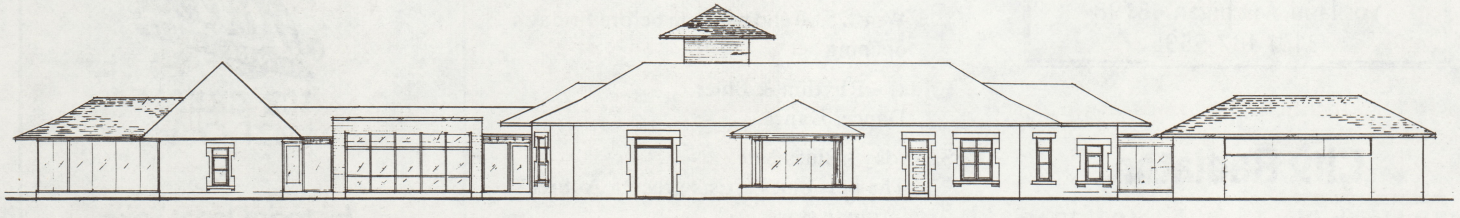
The children's first prize of $25 went to Naomi and Judith White, also of Ypsilanti.

All of the Gingerbread Houses are on display in the windows of the following Depot Town businesses:

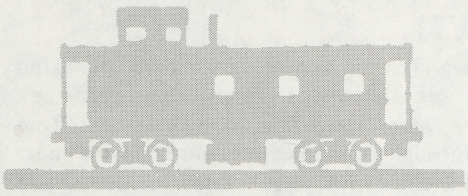
- ☐ Depot Exchange, 54 East Cross
- ☐ River Art Works, 48 East Cross
- ☐ Old Town Restaurant, 38 East Cross
- ☐ City Body, 20 East Cross
- ☐ Esquire Interiors, 10 East Cross

Visitors to Depot Town and the Festival of Lights can view the gingerbread house entries until January 6th, 1988.

In the street-side (east) elevation, the baggage shed and glassed area become a large dining/meeting room. The breezway becomes "terrace dining" with a deep extention matching the width of the baggage shed. The main depot building holds a lounge and several dining areas. One unique feature will be opening up the spectacular fireplace nook. The portico will still serve as the main entrance, being partly glassed-in to provide a vestibule and foyer. The new kitchen addition will cover the space which formerly saw the extensive greenhouse. Parking is planned for the former garden area north of this point, along the tracks.



EAST ELEVATION



D.T.A. 17 December 1987

Guests: Cheryl Brown, a new neighbor, with experience in promoting Detroit's Montreaux Jazz Festival, Grand Prix and Detroit Rennaissance. We look forward to your input and involvement.

Announcements:

— Country 'DBA' from updated. (see related article)

— Nonprofit insurance to be investigated.

— Elyse Kidder's letter praising Depot Town and Sidetrack.

1'1 November minutes approved as published.

Treasury: no report

Standing Committees:

— Membership/Volunteerism: Bonni Rosen will be sending out a mailing to past and present members of DTA featuring information on how DTA contributes to you, and how as a member, you can contribute to your community. If you would like to help with the mailing or any other DTA activity/event, contact Bonnie c/o 482-FINE.

— Caboose: After the summers' painting and general 'spiffing up,' the Caboose is ready for rentals. @ $25.00 per event with a $10 key deposit. Contact Gary McKeever c/o 483-4256.

— NIFTY (New Initiative For Tourism in Ypsilanti): Jerry Meadows report receiving a contract from the Follett House Assocatinate granting DTA rights to install lighting and to light the Depot Town 'Welcome' sign for one year. A motion was passed to request the contract be changed to a three-year duration of the lighting agreement. The contract has been returned to F.H.A. with this request.

— Jerry Meadows is currently making further inquiries of Michigan State Housing Development Authority funds available for rental/rehab project.

— An area children's program including entertainment, activities and a toys fair were proposed. Those interested or wishing to participate should attend January's DTA meeting. Bring your ideas.

— Budget/Events: Carolyn McKeever has completed a preliminary budget proposal for 1988's activities. A final proposal will be introduced for discussion at January's DTA meeting.

2nd Vice Presidents:

— Merchants' Committee: no report.

— Artists & Artisans: holiday artists' market at Saturday's Farmers' Market.

— Antique Dealers: no report.

— Engineering Society: Neighborhood kids are always looking for work: Anyone with undone jobs can contact the Engineering Society through the DTA or by leaving written word at the Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198.

— Antique Engine Club: the annual Christmas party was a joyful occasion at the Old Town Restaurant. It is reported that a good time was had by all.

Other business: DTA has renewed membership in the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce.

Best Yet Award: To all of the volunteers who have acted to make Depot Town a vibrant community in which to live by volunteering to host the Festival of Lights from November through January. Thank you.

Golden Goose Award: To Domino's Farm's "Frank Lloyd Light" show's extravagant attempt to compete with the Riverside Park Festival of Lights.

Sincerest form of flattery

The Rag lampooned in *The Wag*

We get all kinds of mail delivered to The Old Caboose, but last month's batch included several Xeroxed copies of a parody of *The Depot Town Rag's* December 1987 issue. The four-page included item-for-item parallel's to our December front page (all done by hand), a map, a photograph and another page which was composed in two different typefaces.

In contrast to our monthly publication, the parody issue focused on another neighborhood, but with much the same style. Their news, however, was not so good as Depot Town's regular reports. Drugs, prostitution, muggings, theft, street people and homelessness were the overriding issues. Aside from the "#1 Dec '87" dateline, *The Wag* could have easily been about Depot Town a little more than a decade ago. The issue focused upon very real issues and folks at *The Rag* hope that editorializing and publishing will make as much of a difference in that district, too. Honest committment and cooperation on the part of the property owners are a necessity, too.

Such satire becomes a cruel lampoon when the focus is not really funny, simply ironic. We wonder if this clever example will be shared in the neighborhoods which still are experiencing such problems. Humor can, indeed, be used to effect social change. We hope the anonymous writer(s?) will put this talent to good use.

The copies are on display in The Old Caboose.

January 1988

for the good of the block

in the Old Caboose

unless otherwise noted

Foundation

8 p.m. Thursday 1/7

1st in Winter Jazz Series

Saturday 1/16

6 p.m. Freight House

Artists & Artisans

Monday 1/11

7:30 p.m. Caboose

Antique Dealers

Tuesdays at 6:10 p.m.

Old Town Restaurant

Merchants

Thursdays at 8:00 a.m.

Old Town Restaurant

Engine Club

Thursday 1/28

TBA

Engineering Soceity

TBA

Depot Town Rag

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG:

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc., a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

The Depot Town Association, Inc.,
Tom Dodd, President
The Caboose, 400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Get Your Printing At

Standard Printing Company

35 East Cross St. • Ypsilanti, MI

Patronize The Merchants That Bring You The

* * * * * * * *

Depot Town Rag

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PEDDLER'S PATH
44 East Cross

RIVER ARTWORKS
CUSTOM FRAMING
DESIGNER MATS
482-8785
48 E. CROSS
DEPOT TOWN

Cross Street Antiques
33 East Cross

YPSI FOOD COOP
WHOLE NATURAL FOOD IN BULK OR SMALL QUANTITIES
M,T,Th,F 10-7 Wed. 10-9 312 N.River
483-1520 Sat. 9-7 Sun. 12-5

Our Little Secret
Resale Clothing & Other Niceties
23 East Cross

YPSILANTI RECYCLING PROJECT
651 Rice Street
(just north of the Farmers' Market in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town
Open every Saturday
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Collecting newspaper, glass, used motor oil and ferrous cans
A non-profit organization

Big Bob's Magazines
Magazines, Comics, Posters
50 East Cross 485-4930

D.B.A. - Depot Town

When the official envelope came to our mail slot in The Old Caboose, we wondered what kind of official business we might have with the front offices of Washtenaw County. It proved to be a form through which to re-register our name, *The Depot Town Rag.* Many years ago, Tom Kornilakis of the Old Town Restaurant, had the foresight to register our banner's name under the D.B.A. (doing business as . . .) statues with the county just to guarantee that no one else could use the same name in their enterprise. Today's format simply wanted to know if we were still using it and if we intended to continue doing so.

We do. We sent it back in the return mail. And we reflected on our name and other names in the neighborhood since we first registered.

Such moniker-officiality causes us to wonder about some which have come and gone through the district in the last decade. Tom's own establishment, the *Old Town Restaurant,* is one of the most secure businesses in the county, and few will confuse it with the *Old Town* in Ann Arbor. A quick check of the Ypsilanti phone book shows the *Old China* restaurant up Cross Street in University Village, and then *Old D.R.'s* number without an address. *Old Town Restaurant* is next, followed by *Oldani,* and then *Old Town Coin and Gold* and *Old Towne Plumbing.* The plumbers are in the downtown commercial district on Michigan Avenue, which, of course, is a year or two older than Depot Town. True, in Ypsilanti, no one has the market on Old or Olde. We didn't look under *Ye Olde,* but that's wide open, too. Cute, but wide open.

Quickly, we turned to the *Ds.* That list begins with *Depot Doo,* a smart hair salon in Depot Town. It is followed by *Depot Exch The,* which we quickly recognize as the district's first antique shop, The Depot Exchange. Next is *Depot Florist & Greenhouse* at 2004 East Michigan Avenue, in downtown Willow Run. Shallower historians may think this a misnomer, even though they back up to the same rail line, but further digging will prove that this business originally began in the greenhouse which supplied the gorgeous nineteenth century gardens in Ypsilanti's famed railroad district. They, like so many others of that time, moved to the highway when the railroads declined.

There was a day in Depot Town when just about everything was named for the atmospheric spectrum following a rainy event. Wishful thinking may have led those optimistic entrepreneurs to adopt the hippy logotype and sunny symbol for good luck. Ten years ago we saw Rainbow Graphics, Rainbow Silver and Gold, Rainbow Jewelry and Rainbow Gifts all smiling their post-sixties hues in Depot Town. None remain in 1988. Today's pot of gold lies somewhere south of here, in Ypsilanti Township with *Rainbow Club, Rainbow Products* and *Rainbow Tree Center, Inc.* - all located on Whittaker Road. Good luck.

No one has succeeded in exclusively registering the name *Depot Town* yet, but just about every business in the block has been quick to list it on their business cards, their invoices, their advertising and their return addresses. *The Ypsilanti Press* photo of the district at Christmas seemed almost matter-of-fact about it's sentimental headline, "O little town of Depot Town," emblazoned next to a full-color photo covering the top half of the front page last month. They didn't have to tell any of their readers where it was. Everybody knows where Depot Town is, today. But the name is too generic to be exclusively registered or owned.

Just ask any local realtor. Or read those little real estate catalogs published almost as often as *The Rag.* Seems everyone in the east end of Washtenaw County is claiming their property is in good old Depot Town.

"Basement apartment in Depot Town." There aren't any.

"Historic home in Depot Town." There aren't that many. (Depot Town proper, contains only nine houses: four on Photo Street, three next to the Thompson block and one across the street from them, next to the Depot. Everybody else is just wishing.)

Today it seems that Depot Town is the place to be. We're back on the map. Only twelve years ago the Chamber of Commerce brochure placed it's map's legend over the corner of Cross and River Streets. There wasn't anything there that anyone wanted to brag about. But, as the song says, "Look at all the people, gathered 'round the Depot! The good old days are here again, down in Depot Town."

"What's in a name?" Will Shakespeare asked. In 'Depot Town' there's a recognition of history, old values, small town warmth, and traditional American entrepreneurship. In a time when the rest of the world seems to be getting bigger and more artificial and impersonal, communities like Depot Town set out to prove that small and real and immediate are still worth setting your name to. And we're succeeding.

We're *Doing Business As* . . . Depot Town!

Hon's
Flowers & Fancies
46 East Cross 482-2124

B & D Retail
Plumbing & Heating
310 North River 487-1510

Thompson Building Mall
Over 4000 square feet of dealers
412 North River • 484-4288

City Body, Inc.
20 East Cross
Front Alignments
Special - **$24.95**

Jim MacDonald's Antiques
Apple Annie's
Vintage Clothing
29 East Cross • 481-0555

WE *love to* **BUY ANTIQUES**
DEPOT EXCHANGE ANTIQUES
54 E Cross. • 482-1780
Next to Sidetrack
Professional Stripping & Refinishing

Sidetrack
Good Food, Good Drinks,
Good Times
56 East Cross **483-1053**

The Cricket Box
19 East Cross Street
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198
(313) 487-5595

City Radiator
110 North River **483-2248**

RAGTIME
Our 153rd great year
Down in Depot Town

DEPOT TOWN WINTER Jazz SERIES '88

Depot Town & WEMU
Winter Jazz Series

January 16
-Suzanne Lane with Larry Manderville Trio
-The J.C. Heard Orchestra
February 20
—Flippo
-The White/Margitza Quintet
-The Sunnyland Slim Blues Band
March 19
-Popular Demand
-Russell Green Quintet
-The Regular Boys
For more information, call (313) 487-2229

Aubree's Saloon & Second Floor
39 East Cross

Aubree's Second Floor Entertainment:

Thursday - Open Mike Nite.
Doors open at 8 - 1 a.m.
Win $25.00 and perform before Friday's opening act.

Friday - Rhythm & Blues.
Dance, Dance.

Saturday - Blues Nite.
The best blues artists gracing Aubree's intimate stage.

Friday and Saturday, no cover before 9:00 pm except for National Acts

Ike's Depot Town Barbershop
40 East Cross • 483-6300

Olde Towne Coin & Gold
24 E. CROSS STREET
YPSILANTI, MI 48198
(313) 483-6155

Ted's Auto Electric
307 North River • 483-1238

Ypsilanti's Farmers' Market
in historic Depot Town
Every Wed. & Sat.
8 a.m. — 3 p.m.

The Grand Trunk, Ltd.
Cards & Gifts
15 East Cross 485-4994

Miller's Dixie Land
ICE CREAM
42 E. Cross
•
Historic Depot Town
OPEN ALL YEAR!